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January 1983, Number 78

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*The Delius Society  
Journal*

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The Delius Society

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## EDITORIAL

The posthumous reputations of musicians who were infrequent visitors to the gramophone recording studios, especially in the 78 'electric' and LP eras, often hang precariously. To the large record-buying public who use such things as a yard-stick, they can be names locked away in musical history. In this issue we pay tribute to two such notable performers of Delius's music.

Although Albert Sammons in his early days was a fairly frequent 78 recording artist, few of his recordings are of the scale and quality to do full justice to his outstanding artistry. For confirmation of his excellence we can at least turn to the written word. Eugene Goossens, in his autobiography, wrote of Sammons that he 'made the folk-tune in the slow movement [of my first violin sonata] sound so beautiful that I despair of ever hearing it played that way again', and, pairing him with his accompanist William Murdoch, Goossens declared that 'there will never again be on any platform, anywhere, a more perfectly matched team, or one that reached artistry and depth of feeling in performance greater than did those unassuming, modest players.' A strong testimonial indeed.

In a memorial address Herbert Howells spoke of Sammons' 'supreme technical mastery' and 'the flawless ease of his genius...coming to us in the Vaughan Williams *Lark Ascending* or the coda of Delius's *Legend* or in the matchless Elgar cadenza... The deadweight of mechanical difficulty seemed to lie far outside his experience.' In a *Musical Times* tribute, John Ireland likewise remembered Sammons giving 'superb performances of the solo part in the concertos of Elgar and Delius. His qualities as a violinist were personal, and entirely different from those of any British or foreign performer of his time. He had a steadiness of sustained, singing tone, under perfect control, which I have never heard except in the playing of Ysaye... He always impressed me as a true artist, selfless and of deep integrity, a man whose mind, personality and consummate art command one's unqualified respect and admiration.'

Of Evelyn Howard-Jones much less has been written. He partnered Sammons in an acoustic recording of Delius's Second Violin Sonata, and he recorded seven of the piano pieces. While we fortunately have Sammons' account of the Violin Concerto (the Elgar too), we cannot hear the Piano Concerto in Howard-Jones's interpretation which Delius is said to have admired. It is time then to turn the spotlight on these two important figures in the Delius story as well as focusing our attention in this issue on a composer who to some extent came under the Delius spell, E J Moeran.

Turning now to modern recordings, the première broadcast of *Margot La Rouge* (heard again on December 8th) is now available on BBC Artium REGL458 at £5.29. A collection of 11 Delius songs sung by Carol Leatherby, accompanied by Gary Peacock, will shortly be available on cassette from Bedivere Records at £4.95. Finally, a first recording of the Verlaine song *Avant que tu ne t'en ailles*, sung by Sylvia Eaves accompanied by Courtney Kenney, has been included on Cameo Classics GOCLP9020 at about £5.50 discount price.

# DELIUS – MOERAN – ALBERT SAMMONS

by Lionel Hill

The Immortal Trio! Two creative artists of immense yet differing gifts, and possibly the finest violinist this country has known. It was more than chance that drew them together at certain periods in their lives, for each possessed the rare talent of expressing rhapsody in music; indeed the two composers stated that each had Sammons in mind when writing their works for violin.

I was a lad of fifteen when Delius first made a dramatic appeal to a mind hitherto soaked in the music of Grieg – and the touchstone occurred in a curious fashion. My family had just become friendly with Albert Sammons, his wife and daughters. We lived in Bognor, as it was then called, and they at Aldwick nearby. I had several times been thrilled by the playing of Sammons at recitals he gave in the Bognor Pavilion, sometimes accompanied by the famous pianist Mark Hambourg. Their performance of Grieg's Violin Sonata No 2 is still a vivid memory.

At this period Sammons was a prolific recording artist for the Columbia and Vocalion labels, and one day I was visiting his house when he kindly lent me a batch of records performed by himself, mostly sonatas and quartets. When I played them on my wind-up acoustic gramophone I came across two 10" Columbias bearing the labels 'Violin Sonata No 2, composer F Delius, played by A Sammons & E Howard-Jones'. Immediately after placing the heavy soundbox on side one I was entranced by the rhapsodic flight of this strange music. One must remember that in 1924 all records were made acoustically; electric reproduction was yet to come, and although Sammons' exquisite tone came through well enough in this sonata, the equally important piano part was scarcely audible; and yet, though Delius's harmonies were largely missing, I knew at once that this composer would dominate my life, and the ensuing sixty years have not altered that revelation of long ago.

Eventually Albert Sammons became my father-in-law, by which time I had heard some of his magical performances of Delius's Violin Concerto and Violin Sonatas. The Concerto was written for Albert who gave the first performance in 1919 under Dr Adrian Boult. Prior to this event Delius had visited Sammons to seek his advice on editing the violin part of the work.

In a moving broadcast tribute after Sammons' death in 1957 Sir Adrian recalled how, at the time of the Concerto's première (on January 30 1919), Sammons was in The Guards' Band and due to play for an all-night ball at the Albert Hall on the night before the concert. It became necessary for strings to be pulled in high places so that Sammons could obtain leave from the ball and appear on the concert platform the following evening! Many years later Albert pencilled-in on my score those passages where he and Delius had made alterations.

Sammons was largely self-taught, yet he acquired an impeccable technique allied to a tone of the utmost sweetness, so perfectly matched to the two concertos he was to make his own — the Elgar and the Delius. Both composers stated that he got to the very heart of their music. Prior to Sammons' first performance of the Elgar it was Kreisler, the dedicatee, with whom the work had become associated. This generous-hearted artist said on one occasion, 'I really cannot understand why I am asked to play the Elgar in England when you have your own supreme Albert Sammons.' There is little doubt that Albert was the first great British violinist.

In passing, I must mention his great sense of fun. On one occasion he was with some friends when Dr Adrian Boult entered, whereupon Albert said, 'Here comes a dry-'un, let's bolt and have one!'

During the summer of 1926 I was staying at Limpsfield, little knowing that Delius would find his final resting place in that part of the beautiful Surrey countryside. This holiday coincided with the issue of Delius's Cello Sonata, played by Beatrice Harrison and Harold Craxton — a revelation and, I have always thought, his finest achievement in chamber music.

Up to this point my knowledge of Delius amounted to *The First Cuckoo*, *The Walk to the Paradise Garden*, *Violin Sonata No 2*, and *Brigg Fair*. Then came the 1929 Delius Festival and I went to every concert, marvelling at the genius of the composer and his finest interpreter, Sir Thomas Beecham. One concert at the Aeolian Hall was devoted to the chamber works and provided one of the highlights of my life. I obtained a seat in the front row of the Dress Circle, next to the gangway. Just before the concert started I was amazed to see the ground floor audience turn round en bloc and gaze up to where I was sitting, seeming to look straight at me! Turning round myself I saw the cause of the excitement. Delius was being wheeled down the gangway by his wife and, I seem to remember, Eric Fenby. To my consternation they came to a halt next to me! The very presence of this frail, aristocratic-looking genius filled me with awe. The audience were standing, vigorously clapping and looking up at the composer. I also stood and clapped but did not dare to look straight at the figure so close beside me.

Whilst the concert was in progress I once or twice furtively glanced sideways at Delius. Tears were running down his pitifully sunken cheeks and I distinctly heard him murmur, 'Beautiful, beautiful.' I shall never forget that concert.

In 1933 I wrote to Delius, enclosing my miniature score of *Brigg Fair* which had been with me during my schooldays. I told him how much his music meant to me and asked if he would kindly autograph my score. Only after I had posted the little parcel did I realize that I had forgotten to enclose stamps for its return. This omission strengthened my doubts about the likelihood of a reply. However, Delius did reply from Grez on March 6th with a charming letter and inscription on the score, which I have since learned from Dr Fenby was written by Jelka to Delius's dictation; a year later both of them were dead.

Dear Mr Hill,

I was very pleased to receive your kind letter. Please also thank Mr Sammons for his kind wishes. How much I should love to hear him play my new Sonata!! He is a supreme artist.

Yours sincerely,  
Frederick Delius.

[The Sonata referred to was No 3, dictated to Fenby and dedicated to Sammons. Sadly, Delius never heard Albert play the work.]

It was not until 1934 that some of the major works I heard at the Festival came to be recorded for the first time and were issued as Delius Society Volume One, and before the outbreak of War in 1939 two more volumes were issued.

During the late 'twenties and early 'thirties I did a lot of flying, owning my own 'plane, and Delius's music was always with me, seeming to accentuate the beautiful cloudscapes and limitless horizon that only a pilot, or a climber in Delius's beloved Norwegian mountains can fully experience in all their glory; for this music seems always to be reaching beyond the Present and towards the furthestmost limits of human vision.

Those three volumes of records made it possible to grasp the extent of Delius's achievement, though one realized that his authentic works were not of the market place and would never appeal to a vast audience; but, for those attuned to his rich vein of rhapsody there would be little else with which to compare.

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My introduction to the music of E J Moeran occurred in early 1943. As in the case of Delius and his impact on me via two acoustic records twenty years previously, the first sounds of Moeran's music came to me when I switched-on a tiny Wartime Utility wireless set — the very antithesis of Hi-Fi! Yet the music riveted my attention, for its spirit was that of Delius but with a strong folksong element, and at the end a baritone voice called across some lonely expanse of water. When the piece faded into the distance I remained stunned by this second revelation of a composer so completely in tune with my own tastes in music. The little radio announced that I had been listening to *Lonely Waters* — a most apt title for such a haunting work.

I obtained Moeran's address from the BBC and wrote to him, asking whether he liked Delius's music, commenting that I sensed a similar feeling in *Lonely Waters* to that of the older composer. A most interesting reply came from Kington in Herefordshire. Yes, Moeran did indeed like Delius, but with reservations in regard to some of his later works, as the following extract from his letter will show:-

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*I have always had a great admiration for Delius, that is to say what I call good Delius. There is also some very bad Delius, such as his Second Violin Sonata, Cello Sonata and his piano music. In fact he seems to have gone to pieces roughly from 1913 or so to the end of his life. He had just written himself out and run dry, so to speak.*

*However, my love of his really great works remains unimpaired by the trash he wrote latterly. To my mind The Mass of Life, Songs of Sunset, Sea Drift, Village Romeo, First Dance Rhapsody, most of Brigg Fair, and The Song of the High Hills are masterpieces, each in its own different way.*

*I should also have added Appalachia to the list of great works.*

*My first introduction to Delius was in 1913, when I was a student at the RCM, and I have never forgotten the profound impression it made on me at the time.*

Moeran went on to say that he was struggling to finish a Rhapsody for piano and orchestra in time for the Proms. *'I seem to have lost the knack of writing piano music recently'*. Thus was my feeling that Moeran admired Delius confirmed, the only jarring note being his love for the Piano Concerto, which is surely not one of the composer's most representative works.

In his next letter he stated, *'Delius's Violin Concerto is full of superb things, but it contains one section – the 6/8 dance section near the end which I find lets the work down'*. He mentioned *Paris* as a *'wonderful piece, one of Delius's greatest achievements'*, and repeated that *Appalachia* is a *'really great work. In a Summer Garden is, I think, one of Delius's most satisfactory pieces.'*

After further correspondence I told Moeran that I was the son-in-law of Albert Sammons, which, I gathered from his reply, both surprised and pleased him.

On July 30th 1943 Moeran's Violin Concerto was played by Arthur Catterall at a Prom concert and my wife and I met Moeran during the interval. He accepted with pleasure our invitation to come and stay at our house in Bucks, and suggested this should be after a Prom concert on August 19th when his new Piano Rhapsody was to be given its première. During that memorable visit we got to know a little about that lovable man, and he soon became 'Jack' to all the family. It was the first of many nights he was to stay under our roof over the next seven years; indeed his mother told us that Jack always enjoyed being with my family in the country in the peaceful beauty of Bucks. Cities were an abomination to him.

On one occasion he told me that he had Sammons specifically in mind while writing his Violin Concerto, but that when he asked Arthur Bliss, then head of music at the BBC to let Sammons give the first performance Bliss insisted that Catterall should play it, saying, 'Think yourself lucky to have it performed at all!' 'And that', said Jack, 'was that.'

Catterall's playing of this lovely concerto was more than adequate, but both Jack and I knew that only Albert Sammons would provide the ideal interpretation of a work so imbued with the nostalgia to be found in that other concerto which Sammons had made his own – the Delius. After a lot of persuasion on my part Sammons agreed to look over the work; rehearsed it at our house, liked it, and eventually gave two performances under Sir Adrian Boult, the first at a

Prom on August 28th 1945 and again from the BBC Studios at Norwich on April 28th 1946. Reaction from audiences and critics was more than favourable, and I became obsessed with the idea that Sammons must be allowed to record the Concerto before his announced intention of retiring became a fact. The following letter from Jack to Albert, dated September 1st 1945, shows how much he appreciated the latter's performance:

My dear Albert,

Now that what I had so long looked forward to, namely to hear my Concerto played by yourself, has in fact happened, please let me thank you from the bottom of my heart for your superb playing of it. The poetry which seems to be instinctive in your conception of it, and which I have always felt, I am now assured that you are the only one to play it. Apart from this, the trouble and labour you have put into the study of my Concerto.

Yours with the utmost gratitude & admiration,  
Jack.

During the latter part of the War I had campaigned in the *Gramophone* for a recording of the Delius Violin Concerto, receiving letters in support from all over the World, many from those serving in HM Forces Overseas, and as a result of me sending these to both HMV and Decca Sammons recorded the Concerto with Sargent and the Liverpool Phil., and the Third Violin Sonata with Kathleen Long. Unfortunately the Concerto was not as well recorded as it should have been. Walter Legge, who was in charge of the session, kept moving Albert away from the microphone causing his beautiful tone to be swamped by the orchestra. The resulting imbalance, however, was largely rectified in the later transfer to LP.

Something had now to be done about getting the Moeran Concerto recorded, so for the next few years I gathered support via the *Gramophone*. Sir John Barbirolli joined me in urging HMV to issue the work, pointing out that time was short. Sir John told me that he loved Jack's Concerto and would give anything to partner Sammons in a recording. But this project never materialized, and Sammons died in 1957, seven years after Jack Moeran.

Jack rarely discussed his own music with anyone, but talked freely about other composers — which I found fascinating. Delius, Vaughan Williams, Butterworth, Walton (Violin Concerto), Roussel, Bax, Ireland and Sibelius were his favourites. Schumann and Britten he didn't like. He played many of my scores on our piano. Two in particular fascinated him — Grieg's Op.66 folk song arrangements and Delius's Requiem, both of which he had not heard before. Most evenings were spent with my gramophone, his chief delight being the three Delius Society albums which he liked to hear just before going to bed, and would often say, 'We can't retire without hearing that marvellous Intermezzo from Fennimore and Gerda again. Goossens's oboe part is superb!'

It has always been a source of joy that Jack once played his Second Symphony for me on his piano — in 1948 I believe — and I can still re-call the



E.J. Moeran, photographed by the author in 1943

sheer sweep of the music. A great deal had been written, the Irish side of his character predominant. It is a tragedy that only seventeen pages of MSS now remain. A few years previously, whilst out for a country walk with Jack, he suddenly took my arm and said confidentially, 'You know, I'm having the devil of a job with my new Symphony. It's the form that's bothering me - the three movements don't "jell", so to speak, and it's driving me mad.' After a moment's hesitation I replied, 'Couldn't you make a one continuous movement work of it, on the same lines as Sibelius's Seventh?' We walked on in silence for a while when Jack muttered, 'Umm....umm'. In a later letter to me he stated that the Symphony was going well and was indeed shaping-up as a one-movement work.

During my seven years' friendship with Jack Moeran we seldom discussed the music of Delius - it was unnecessary to do so, for the subject was a sacrosanct bond between us. However, he did retract some of the adverse comments he had made in his first letter to me, quoted above, especially in regard to the Cello Sonata, my score of which he borrowed to play with his wife, Peers Coetmore the cellist, and agreed with me that it was a fine work.

I remember Jack telling me that the lengthy passage for clarinet in the final movement of *his* Violin Concerto 'was written for my dear friend Frederick Thurston'. It is this work above all which reveals Delius's influence on Moeran and undoubtedly accounted for Sammons' attraction to the piece. Although Sammons gave about one hundred performances of the Elgar Concerto he once stated that he preferred the Delius. It is worth mentioning that after I had played Albert's records of the latter to Jack he said, 'I think they are splendid and I find that I like the Concerto much more than I did before.' Other instances of Moeran's debt to Delius are the piano piece, *Summer Valley*, and *Nocturne*, for voices and orchestra, both dedicated to Frederick.

Moeran was a close friend of Peter Warlock, with whom he stayed at times, and the latter, who was the stronger character, had a marked influence on his friend both musically and in their mutual addiction to pubs and motorcycles! Moeran was a despatch rider during the First War, sustaining an inoperable head wound which left a piece of metal near his brain and probably caused his sudden death in 1950. One can hear the voice of Warlock in some of Jack's songs and his *Serenade in G* for orchestra.

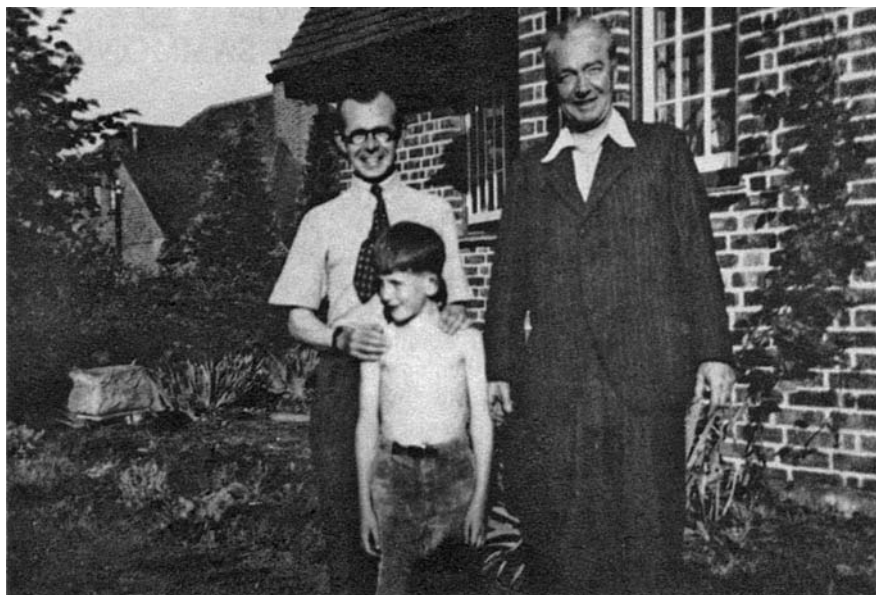
I met Moeran during the intervals at two of the 1946 Delius Festival concerts, at one of which Sammons joined us in the bar. We were full of enthusiasm for the music we'd just heard, some of which had been dictated to Eric Fenby, so I couldn't resist saying to Jack, 'Do you still think Delius had "written himself out by 1913", as you said in an early letter to me?' 'Well', replied Jack, 'I must admit that the old boy was full of marvellous music right to the end!'

When HMV issued *A Village Romeo & Juliet* in 1948 Jack was staying with us and I played the opera to him one evening. I shall never forget the effect this music had on him. He paced about the room, puffing hard on his pipe and muttering, 'What's the use, everything worthwhile has already been said in this music!' How much Moeran was influenced by Delius is a matter for conjecture, but that evening was a revelation to my wife and me, and we knew the truth.

That fine composer Patrick Hadley was an old friend of Jack's, so it was an especial pleasure for me to play the former's new choral work, *The Hills*, I had had privately recorded. We followed the score together and I was amused to see Jack's so-typical smile come and go as the music proceeded — as if he was in the presence of familiar surroundings, and approved of what he found. 'Yes, I enjoyed that!' he said, which gave me much pleasure also, for both composers meant a great deal to me.

Jack had known George Butterworth before his untimely death in the 1914-1918 War. Apparently Butterworth was an out-and-out countryman who spent much of his life in a caravan, 'in order to get close to Nature,' said Jack. I can always detect a loving tribute to Butterworth in parts of the long slow movement of Moeran's *G minor Symphony* — *A Shropshire Lad* makes its presence felt.

Jack adored Vaughan Williams' *Pastoral Symphony*, *Flos Campi* and, of course, the *Norfolk Rhapsody* which first opened his eyes to what could be done with folk song in a serious composition.



The author and his son with Jack Moeran, a photograph taken by Peers Coetmore c.1946

In 1945 my wife and I stayed with Jack and his mother - we in an hotel nearby - at Kington, on the Welsh Border, and enjoyed walking with him on the heights of Radnor Forest. He told us that the inspiration for much of his *Sinfonietta* came to him in the solitude of this expanse of border scenery and this spirit dominates whenever I listen to what is possibly his masterpiece - perfect in form and content. Beecham gave a performance of the *Sinfonietta* at the Albert Hall, but Jack thought his tempo in the first movement 'wanted gingering up'. I do wish he could have heard Norman del Mar's reading of this work, for his tempi are just what Jack required.

In 1947 we lent the Moerans our house whilst 9.3 were away on holiday and Jack finished his *Serenade in G* there; it was given its premiere at the following year's Proms under the baton of Basil Cameron. At the end of 1949 we sold our house in Bucks and moved to Cricklewood. On March 5th 1950 Jack came for two nights on one of which he came with us to hear a work of his played at the Albert Hall. The following morning I dropped him at a bus stop in Willesden Lane. How was I to know that I would never see him again? He went straight over to his beloved Kenmare on the South-West coast of Eire where, on December 1st, he fell off the little pier and was drowned. The last nine months of his life are shrouded in mystery, for even his mother only received one letter, and he never returned to England.

Thus ended an era in my own life, for gone were Delius and Moeran; and Sammons, who was by then suffering from Parkinson's disease, seldom played again, and died in 1957.

# RECOLLECTIONS OF EVLYN HOWARD-JONES AND ALBERT SAMMONS

by ESTHER RIXON

At the age of 18 (1932) I was sent to London to have an audition with Evlyn Howard-Jones who had, so it was said, left the RAM and launched a new school, the Howard-Jones – Sammons School of Music; ‘HJ’ (as we called him) and Albert Sammons being heads of their respective departments. HJ’s staff was made up of his best piano pupils (Dorothea Vincent and Nesta Llewellyn among them) and Eda Kersey with Grace Thynne (Mrs Howard-Jones) teaching the violinists who were not yet, or never would be, advanced enough for Sammons. I went to Eda Kersey for two years, then on to Sammons.

It was all very much a new world for me. HJ was then in his prime—handsome, cultured, well-known as a pianist and teacher and a man of the world. He was helped and supported by his devoted wife, Grace Thynne (as she was known professionally). She had been a pupil of Sevcik and was a relative of the Marquess of Bath, hence her social background helped at a time (50 years ago) when such things mattered. Her teaching was excellent but I can remember it as rather over-laced with Sevcik’s very boring exercises!

Howard-Jones and his wife lived in Eaton Terrace and a large studio was built on at the rear, where there were mews – hence no complaints of noise. I shall never forget my first sight of the area connecting the house to the studio, full of books and music. No novels; musical history, biographies, art, philosophy and psychology and so forth – many of them out of print and almost priceless. Fascinating; and often, as I waited my turn to enter the studio for something like a dreaded exam, I forgot the present and immersed myself, visually, in books. Howard-Jones noticed my obsession and would lend me quite a number; so I first learnt about Nietzsche’s writings, which played such a part in Delius’s life, as I was to learn later.

Every Wednesday HJ gave a lecture to the whole school; they were the best I have ever heard – he seemed to excel in any musical subject with a fluent delivery, concise and very clear – an hour soon passed. Sometimes he would test *our* knowledge, and I remember a Scottish boy impishly trying to get the better of HJ and being thoroughly demolished! I also remember attending his piano lessons, a sort of master class and very instructive; through these sessions I acquired a good knowledge of the pianist’s repertoire, many a concerto was also played on two pianos. Howard-Jones seemed to revel in all these performances and his pupils loved him. Unfortunately he had no patience with the less gifted and soon rid himself of their presence by some very satirical remarks!

We were also treated to some lovely violin and piano sonata recitals by Sammons and Howard-Jones, very informal and hence more enjoyable. On these occasions Delius and other “moderns” came up and it was a wonderful way to be introduced to such music, with repeated opportunities to familiarise oneself with the then strange harmonies, all in complete contradiction to the rules rammed down us by HJ’s excellent harmony teacher, who had to get us through the LRAM examination.



Evlyn Howard-Jones

In the summer months, **HJ** and Grace would take up residence in their cottage on the Common in the village of Cholesbury, Bucks. It was in a delightful situation, so quiet - who would dream that London was only an hour's train journey away? Grace loved it and seemed so relaxed; her husband seemed more at home in London - anyhow, the cottage ceilings were so low he had to adopt a permanently stooping posture! However, as usual he fitted in beautifully; dressed in country clothes, still looking elegant, picking raspberries if required and, for the fortunate few who went there, taking us for country walks; discoursing as we walked in his usual majestic and meticulous style but somehow including the surrounding trees and hedges.

Back in London, it was 'business as usual', Sevcik was resurrected - also Tobias Matthay. On Fridays **HJ** assumed the role of conductor of both chorus and orchestra, separately or sometimes together - if separately I had to attend both. Although no singer I had to join the contraltos and certainly, in my youth did manage some sort of voice, or else I should have been ejected! Particularly enjoyable were the Brahms songs with harp, the German Requiem, some Schubert and Elgar. The orchestral sessions gave us the opportunity to rehearse



our own concertos and the pianists would also bring theirs along, the usual classics and those I'd not heard before — de Falla, Debussy, Ravel. Fridays were the greatest fun, an almost festive day to end the week.

At the end of three years, my academical training being duly completed successfully, I said farewell to the school and passed on privately to Sammons. I still saw Grace and HJ occasionally and was always given a warm welcome — they were a delightful couple, always so interested in their pupils, past and present. Alas! the war broke it all up — I went to HJ's 70th birthday party (in 1947) and he was but a shadow of his former self. Grace asked me to come again, she was under terrible strain nursing him, and that was the last I saw of him. I saw her later, when he was no more, but she too soon followed him. I remember them both with affection and gratitude.

Turning back to 1934, the news that I was to study violin-playing under Albert Sammons came as a bombshell, received with a mixture of delight and trepidation it was so unbelievable. I stayed with him for five years, when he helped me to get work and the outbreak of war broke up life in general.

Sammons was a wonderful violinist who, at a time when only foreign violinists were heard in our concert halls, achieved an outstanding position in the musical world. He was a man of the people, yet a natural intellectual; always quiet, courteous and warm-hearted but having no time for fools. Only once I saw him in a temper with someone who called at the door — he seemed to be ablaze, to my astonishment, but quickly cooled down. Unorthodox he was in every way: his Sealyham dog 'Bingo' was often stationed under the grand piano, waiting for the pre-lunch stroll at the end of the lesson.

One's first impression was of a man with a mask-like, stoical face with astonishing piercing blue eyes. As I grew to know him more there were some wonderfully witty tales of 1914-18 Army life and later equally witty tales of experiences as a soloist and sonata-player, sometimes against himself. He enjoyed recalling leaving the BBC one afternoon — I can remember him clearly with his bow-tie and a rather horrible-looking large, flat, broad-brimmed black hat — and hearing as he walked away a small boy saying to another: 'Look! there's one of 'em!'

Sometimes he seemed a lonely figure; I am sure he enjoyed his elevated position, yet talked of the past with nostalgia. The violin was a creed to him — always experimenting with various thicknesses of paper on the fingerboard of his or other people's instruments; the bridge, the soundpost, all were reviewed. He and Lionel Tertis spent hours together in their private research in fiddle-making. Where Tertis became involved with Richardson, the viola-maker, Sammons was bound up with Alfred Vincent, one of whose instruments Sammons persuaded me to buy for £30 until I could afford a better one. It did very good service, being often mistaken for an 'old Italian'!

Sammons was a most gifted and interesting teacher, often adding an extra half-hour or more to the scheduled hour, helping one to gain confidence by developing one's natural style but firmly dismissing any traces of bad taste. Humour was often introduced in a lesson — he much enjoyed playing Kreutzer no.35, *Marcia (moderato)*, marching round the room in true Army style, a most difficult feat, and would join in when I collapsed with laughter.



When the more formal part of training was completed (exams) and we moved on to Delius (Sonatas 2 and 3), Bloch and others, it was a revelation. In his final years I saw little of him; the last time, his terminal illness was rearing its head and when he spoke to me in his usual warm fashion I felt almost too overcome to converse with him. For me, a light went out of the world when he left it.



## ALBERT SAMMONS (1886 – 1957)

Albert Sammons was born on 23 February 1886 (with a caul, which sailors say is lucky and anyone born with one will never drown). He was taught by his father up to the age of thirteen, his parent being a good amateur musician who also took young Albert to concerts, which enthralled him.

All his life Albert was keen on sport – boxing, cricket, wrestling, golf and football; but all the time he was practising hard on the violin. At school he joined the band, and was top of his class in general subjects. His first professional engagement came in 1898 at the Earl's Court Exhibition under Voorzanger, where Albert led a band of twelve, playing popular classics which gave him experience of sight-reading.

He left school in 1898 and joined a small band at the Leicester Square Hotel; later he was offered an engagement at the Gaiety Restaurant where he was heard by Ivan Caryll, conductor and composer of musical comedy next door at the Gaiety Theatre. Sammons also played in so-called 'Hungarian' bands which were all the fashion at the time and were obliged to wear uniforms to disguise their British nationality and were not allowed to speak English. Only foreigners were considered to be musical in those days!

At this time Sammons was given lessons by a violinist called Alfredo Fernandez who had studied with the famous Ysaye, and he also played at the Trocadero Restaurant where he had his first opportunity to play solos. In 1905/6 Sammons spent two summer seasons at Harrogate, first in the Spa Hotel and then at the Kursaal Concert Hall (later called The Royal Hall) where he gave his first performance of the Mendelssohn Concerto.

He was married in 1907 and met Maggie Ponsonby, daughter of a Lady-in-Waiting to the Queen, who became an influential friend to Albert and his bride. A member of the Rockefeller family offered to send him to study in Germany, but he said his home responsibilities were too great. After his return from Harrogate to London, Sammons was engaged by F Casano, a cellist, who provided bands for various occasions and parties. This involved playing at noblemen's houses, such as those of the Dukes of Portland and Westminster and Lord Iveagh. He also played at Windsor Castle in the King's Band, the Kaiser and European royalty being present on one occasion. Sitting next to Albert was Ferdinand Weist-Hill, one of the best English violinists of his day and also a pupil of Ysaye, and he gave Albert lessons.



To Miss Esther Rixson - with best wishes  
from sincerely  
Albert Faulman

In 1908 Sammons was playing at the Waldorf Hotel when Thomas Beecham came in to dine. Albert played the Mendelssohn Concerto at breakneck speed to impress the famous guest, for which he received a card saying: 'Well done, but the metronome marking should be so-and-so. Beecham.' In the event Beecham immediately engaged Sammons and within days he became leader and remained so for five years.

In 1913 he played the Saint-Saens Concerto, King George and Queen Mary being present. The composer insisted on a great ovation for Albert. Sammons was the leader of the famous London String Quartet, founded in 1910. He also led the orchestra for Covent Garden during Diaghilev's season, and he went to Germany with Beecham.

1914 was the key year for Albert when he first performed the Elgar Concerto under Safonoff and became famous overnight, receiving engagements from all over the country. Sammons was much involved in Beecham's early championship of Delius, recalling the astonished looks of his players at this new music and Beecham saying, 'Don't be alarmed, gentlemen, this will be a lullaby in twenty years' time!' Albert played in eighteen operas under Beecham and many ballets also. He first performed the Beethoven Concerto in 1913 under Monteux. He played on occasion with Rubenstein, Cortot and Lionel Tertis with whom he made the historic records of the Mozart Duo Concertante.

His repertoire was extensive and included concertos by Beethoven, Brahms, Delius, Elgar, Mendelssohn, Mozart (several), Bruch, Saint-Saens, D'Erlanger, Moeran, Bloch, Szymanowski and Dyson. Later, he became so busy with sonata work that he was obliged to leave the London String Quartet and toured the country with William Murdoch, the Australian pianist. He also gave many recitals with Gerald Moore in the 'twenties and 'thirties, as well as with Ethel Hobday and Geo Tankard. He was present on 26 May 1935 at Delius's burial in Limpsfield churchyard.

Sammons was awarded the CBE in 1944 and gave his final performance – the Elgar – in 1946. For the next eleven years until his death he suffered from Parkinson's disease. On 7 December 1954 a Testimonial Concert took place at the Albert Hall, the London Symphony Orchestra playing under Sir John Barbirolli. HRH the Duchess of Gloucester was present and touchingly withdrew to the back of her box in order that Albert should alone receive the audience's adulation when the concert ended. After Sammons' death a memorial service was given on 1 October 1957 at the Church of Saint Sepulchre, Holborn.

Albert Sammons was a genius much loved by fellow musicians and the public alike, not least by his pupils at the Royal College of Music where he was a professor for many years and known for his modesty and kindness. Had he called himself Alberto Sammonovsky and toured the World he would quickly have become an international artist second to none. Such fame did not interest him, but the people of his own country loved him for what he was – wholly British in feeling and artistry.

by Mrs Bowell-Cumming (née Sammons)  
who is at present writing her father's biography.

## MEMORIES OF ALBERT SAMMONS

### The composer George Lloyd reminisces to Lewis Foreman

Lewis Foreman visited the composer George Lloyd on November 26 1982 to record some memories of his teacher Albert Sammons. The discussion was very wide-ranging and the transcript that follows is only part of the interview, but that part particularly relevant for the members of the Delius Society. Lewis Foreman began by asking George Lloyd how he first met Sammons.

**GL:** When I was about 14½ I 'put a pistol' to my father's head and said, 'Now, you must let me leave school because I want to study music.' We were living down in Cornwall then and my parents didn't quite know what to do with me. Well, my mother knew somebody who knew Albert Sammons. So in due course I went along and played to Albert and much to our surprise he said that he'd teach me. From then on I used to go every two or three weeks and that went on until I was about 20.

**LF:** What exactly was his method in teaching the violin?

**GL:** As everybody knows, he taught himself, and he had some very definite notions about what one should do. But you wouldn't call him a pedant in the strictest sense because he was a very practical musician. He spent a tremendous amount of time working at one's bowing technique. He attempted to develop the right hand in a way I don't think most fiddle teachers bother about. For instance, if you watch fiddlers' bow hands, they generally have rather stiff fingers. Now, he moved his fingers very freely (he had beautiful hands). He used to make me practise just moving the bow with the action of the fingers: it made a horrible sound — it only moved about an inch and a half — but it helped develop the fingers of the bowing hand, so that when you took the whole stroke you were using the fingers as well as the wrist. That was one of the first things I had to study. Then the other was the method of sliding. He was very particular about the sliding technique, and he was really, I think, in advance of his time then, because he was an extremely clean player. He never *ever* did a glissando to a high note unless he meant to. He had worked out a very clean technique of slides, and at that time — we're talking now of over 50 years ago — there were still a lot of fiddlers around who did a tremendous amount of slithering and sliding. It was tone, tone all the time with him. He even went as far as to invent a little gadget which he called a 'tone perfecter' — the idea was to make fiddlers obliged to play up near the bridge, because it's up near the bridge that you get the strength. He himself had a really gorgeous sound. He had this lyrical quality, and every note seemed to sing.

**LF:** Now, what about the Delius Concerto?

**GL:** The Delius Concerto has the misfortune to be one of those works — unlike say, the Glazunov Concerto, which for all its surface glitter, is easier than it sounds — which sounds comparatively easy but is very difficult to put over. That recording of Sammons doesn't really give justice to his playing. He treated

the work, curiously enough, very dramatically. I can still hear him now at the very opening. He would draw himself up and go at the opening 'Taa-dee-dah' – you know – it was tremendously dramatic and it worked very well. People tend to think that Delius was all dreamy and sleepy – and it can get too sleepy – but no, this was quite fiery. Albert had a lot to do with launching that concerto. He told me how one day Beecham gave him the score and said, 'Here, see what you can do with this work.' In his biography of Delius, Beecham referred to the Violin Concerto and said that of course Delius had a very intimate knowledge of the violin. I think Beecham must have been having his little joke and having people on because Albert told me that it was simply terrible, that Delius hadn't got a clue about writing for the fiddle – it was really quite unplayable. And he said – I remember him pointing – 'Look, you see, it was like two flutes running about in thirds – you couldn't begin to play it.' So he said, 'Well, I knocked all that bit out, and then, oh well, there's this bit here, you see, I took that out of the Mendelssohn and shoved it in. Delius was as pleased as anything, because he didn't know where it came from.' That was the bit with the broken octaves – it comes several times.

**LF:** What about Sammons' chamber music playing? In William Primrose's autobiography he eulogises about Sammons. Did he also play the Delius Sonatas?

**GL:** I never heard him play the sonatas. I never heard him play in his quartet either, but I heard him several times play the Mozart with Tertis – that was a wonderful experience, those two fabulous tones.

**LF:** Tertis was, of course, a great stickler for intonation. Presumably Sammons was the same?

**GL:** Oh yes. He just always seemed to hit that note right. His intonation was impeccable.

**LF:** What about the man himself? Can you describe him?

**GL:** He had a lot of charm; a sort of natural courtesy about him, and a certain elegance. He was a Londoner with a rather mild nice smooth voice. He never forgot his orchestral background. 'Don't you forget these orchestral fiddlers; they have to work, you know,' he said. 'We can always take that little fraction of a second to ease a passage, but they can't; they've got a conductor there beating with that stick!' He was very down to earth. Perhaps it was that down to earth English quality about him which possibly prevented him from becoming the big international soloist which he should have been. I liked him very much.

# ANTHONY COLLINS CONDUCTS 'BRIGG FAIR'

## An important interpretation re-assessed

by Michael Gartz

[Mr Gartz is at present an undergraduate at the Eastman School of Music in Rochester, New York]

*Brigg Fair* has always been one of Delius's more popular scores, and record collectors are fortunate in having three different Beecham recordings to choose from. The earliest of these, dating from 1928, is perhaps the finest, containing moments of almost indescribable beauty, while the delicately-blended recording adds a far-off quality to the performance which seems especially apt. One is tempted to regard this as the definitive performance, a miracle of interpretation which could never be challenged, let alone superseded. But *Brigg Fair*, supreme piece of music that it is, can exist in any number of interpretative approaches, and attaching one's self to a single performance can be a dangerous prospect indeed.

Several weeks ago, I came across a record containing the 1953 performance of *Brigg Fair* with the London Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Anthony Collins. 'Interesting', so I thought, but my allegiance to the Beecham recording was so strong that it took me several days finally to settle down and listen to this alternative performance. My initial reaction, surprisingly, was one of pure delight, and each subsequent hearing has confirmed my opinion that this is a performance worthy to be placed alongside Beecham's classic account. It is obvious that Collins was unusually gifted as a Delius interpreter, and on the basis of this recording, he had developed a truly individual approach to this music, devoid of any outside influence. The comment made by Messrs Greenfield, Layton, and March in the *Penguin Stereo Cassette Guide* as to Collins' conducting being 'in the Beecham tradition' is pure rubbish; the greatest compliment we could give Collins is to say that his interpretations are just as individualised as Beecham's, and just as revealing of the music. The textures that he conjures up at the beginning of *Brigg Fair* are pure magic (how often that phrase has been applied to Beecham's Delius performances!), and there is never a moment in the ensuing variations which is less than totally inspired. The most illuminating moment occurs approximately two-thirds of the way through the piece, after the large central climax has been reached, and the theme is presented against off-beat chords in the accompaniment. It is the second of these variations that Collins sees as the dramatic highpoint of the work as a whole. Whereas Beecham keeps this variation moving along, Collins is much more languorous, grave even, conjuring up images of a bleak winter morning, with a cortège slowly descending from the hills. It is all very tragic, and full of that same brand of nostalgia that permeates Mahler's Ninth Symphony, composed two years later. Collins' performance has caused me to reassess *Brigg Fair*, with the result that I now regard it as one of Delius's most profound and sincere compositions. None

of this is meant to derogate Beecham's miraculous performance, but Collins has thrown many details into relief, for which I am grateful.

This performance is available on Decca Eclipse ECS 633, and also contains superb performances of *On Hearing the first Cuckoo in Spring*, *The Walk to the Paradise Garden*, and *A Song of Summer*. My copy happens to be on the American 'London' label, and is a reissue from the early 1960's. The sound is simply astonishing for its age; in fact, I have not heard a more truthful orchestral recording in all of my experience as a record collector. Any Delians who, like myself, have tended to ignore this record in the past, are urged to grab it up before it becomes unobtainable. I have yet to hear the companion issue on Eclipse ECS 634, containing further Collins performances of *Paris*, *Summer Night on the River*, and *In a Summer Garden*, but if they are anywhere near as enlightening as his *Brigg Fair*, I will be more than satisfied.

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## Correspondence

From Roger Buckley, Speldhurst, Kent

I was interested to read (Journal 76, July 1982) your review of two recent commercial recordings of Duo-Art piano roll performances, and glad that you felt able to recommend them. Though you provided admirable background information, certain questions were raised which I think merit a reply.

As you say, the Aeolian Company lent Delius a player grand piano to enable him to listen to Grainger's Duo-Art recordings. When I discussed the matter with Eric Fenby in June 1975 he recalled that the instrument was a Weber, was somewhat unsatisfactory to play by hand, and that one day it was simply removed; later a Gaveau arrived to supplement the Ibach. Perhaps if the instrument had been a Steinway, as you suggest, it would have been more welcome in the Delius household.

Referring to the relative merits of the instruments used in these performances, you conclude that the Steck Boudoir Grand on the Larrikin label was no match for the unspecified instrument on Klavier. I would hazard a guess that the latter instrument was a Steinway Model B grand, with a nominal length of 6ft. 11in. A medium sized instrument such as this would be expected to be tonally superior to one in the 'boudoir' category (usually around 5ft.), yet it is an inescapable fact that most of the commercially sold player grands were of small size. It has been argued that the rolls were coded for these limited tonal reserves. This seems logical, but it is undeniable that most of them sound better on large instruments. This will be confirmed by those of your readers who have attended the annual concerts given by the Player Piano Group in the Purcell Room in London at which both Duo-Art and Ampico rolls have been played on concert grand pianos.

You mention an extra note which had apparently strayed into 'Autumn' of the *North Country Sketches*. Reproducing piano rolls are vastly difficult to

perforate with total accuracy, so that even in original rolls the odd extra or missing note very occasionally occurs. Modern copies of Duo-Art rolls are usually made from original copies (rather than from master rolls, as the originals were) so that such errors can be perpetuated or even compounded. It must be said that the accuracy of original rolls is on the whole quite outstanding, and that each copy earned the artist's declaration, signed on the master roll, that "This Music Roll is my interpretation. It was recorded by me for the Duo-Art and I hereby authorize its use with that instrument."

Other Delius committed to the Duo-Art roll by Grainger includes a transcription of the orchestral part of the *Piano Concerto*, perhaps intended for rehearsal purposes or for performance as a four-handed version with the artist playing the solo part live. Unfortunately this recording is so incomplete that it is unlikely ever to be heard as Grainger may have intended.

Correspondence between Delius and the Aeolian Company exists which strongly suggests that Grainger and Leopold recorded the *Dance Rhapsody No. 1*. This roll was never marketed and to the best of my belief no copy has ever come to light. A form of contract, in French, between Delius and the Aeolian Company, suggests that there was a project to prepare one or more 'biographical rolls' – an elaborate words-and-music medium. As collaboration between the Aeolian Company and several composers (among them Elgar, Ravel and Stravinsky) produced valuable historical information, it is much to be regretted that the Delius project did not materialise.

Or did it? Many exotic endeavours flourished in the few years before the Wall Street crash, only to disappear seemingly for ever; yet some of these have yielded to modern research. Perhaps the manuscript of the Delius 'biographical rolls' even now languishes next to the master roll of *Dance Rhapsody No. 1* in some forgotten cupboard.

**From:** Professor William Randel, Alfred, Maine

I may seem overly sensitive, but certain statements on page 11 of the October 1982 *Delius Society Journal* could be interpreted as casting doubt on my credibility as a biographer. I have no bone to pick with Christopher Palmer, whose 'Rapsodie Floridienne' was altogether delightful, but I do feel more than a little annoyed by the two librarians (Tom Gunn of Jacksonville University's Swisher Library, and Jeff Driggers of Jacksonville's Haydon Burns Library) who, it seems to me, led him down a primrose path of questionable conjecture. If Gunn did find the issue of *All Florida and TV Week Magazine* for 11.4.62\*, I cannot understand how he failed to find the article I cited in my 'Delius in America' as source for what I wrote about a particular piano. Having in my file a clipped-out copy of the article ('He set Florida to music'), I have been able to send a photocopy of it to Gunn, for the benefit of Florida Delians.



Mistakes are easy to make, but difficult to correct. I confess to my own full share of errors, in books and articles I have written and in talks I have given. But what is involved here is not a mistake, and I will feel a continuing dismay until the matter is somehow cleared up.

(\*4.11.62 for UK readers – Ed.)

**From:** Thomas H Gunn, Director of the Swisher Library, Jacksonville

I enjoyed reading the travel pieces in the October edition but believe that I need to comment on Roger Buckley's 'A Visit to Solana Grove' in which the reader is left to wonder about Elizabeth Goudge's *The Castle on the Hill* and about the *Koanga* restoration.

Mr Buckley was not the first person to puzzle over *The Castle on the Hill* being in our Delius collection. It turns out that in years past there was such a zeal to separate anything about Delius from the rest of the collection that the mere mention of his name was criterion enough to warrant its being included in the Delius collection. We have since become wiser. Mrs Peggy Corneley from the Delius Association checked the book out and also read it only to find the one line about Delius mentioned. Needless to say, the book has been removed and added to our general collection.

Delius fans may be interested to know that the original score of *Koanga* had been resting for the last twenty years in a glass case in the Jacksonville University library. Age and the general Florida environment were taking their toll on the manuscript. The pages were becoming more and more brittle; strips that had been originally glued over portions of the text had actually stuck several pages together; the binding was beginning to deteriorate in the worst sort of way; and in general, the feeling was that if *Koanga* were not restored it would deteriorate at a faster and faster pace so that at some future date so much damage would have occurred that it might actually be beyond the point of restoration.

I packed *Koanga* and the Delius manuscript of 1884 in the car and drove to St Augustine to Dobbs Brothers, a library binding company that also does restoration work on fragile books and documents for, among others, the Library of Congress. The restoration people agreed that it was in a sad condition and proposed that the papers be deacidified, cleaned of stains and smudges, repairs made of ripped pages, etc., and that it be rebound in deacidified end papers and goat skin so that it could lie flat for exhibition purposes.

The total price for the restoration was 2,000 dollars. Since the library did not have extra funds for this kind of work, I approached the Friends of the Jacksonville Library, who agreed that our prized holding could only be enhanced in the restoration process. Additionally, the Friends have purchased a new display case that is much larger than the old glass one. At the December 1981 meeting of the Friends, the restored manuscripts were again publicly displayed with members of the Delius Association as the Friends' guests.

## FORTHCOMING EVENTS

**Sunday January 23rd at 7 p.m. Purcell Room, South Bank, London**

Delius's Cello Sonata with Jane Hyland (cello) and Lionel Friend (piano) in a programme of British music to include works by William Hurlstone, Cyril Scott, Benjamin Britten, Nigel Osborne and John Marlow Rhys (f.perf.).

**Tuesday January 25th at 7 p.m. BMIC, 10 Stratford Place, London W.1**

Delius Society talk: 'Delius and Dowson' presented by Charles Barnard.

**Friday February 11th at 7 p.m. Mary Ward House, 5 Tavistock Place, London**

Delius Society talk: 'Structure in Delius' presented by Vernon Handley.

**Saturday February 12th at 7 p.m. St John's Smith Square, London SW1**

Delius's *Immelin* (closing scene) performed by Opera Viva conducted by Leslie Head in a concert survey of British Opera from 1876 to 1914.

**Monday March 21st at 7 p.m. BMIC, 10 Stratford Place, London W.1**

Delius Society talk: 'The Delius letters' presented by Lionel Carley.

**Tuesday April 19th at 7 p.m. BMIC, 10 Stratford Place, London W.1**

Delius Society talk presented by Arthur Ridgewell.

**Saturday July 2nd London**

Delius Society AGM at Mary Ward House, followed by the Annual Dinner at the Bloomsbury Centre Hotel. Further details in the next issue.

**Please note** also the following Delius items in the Wigmore Hall *British Series* detailed on the leaflet enclosed (for UK members):

February 5th: String Quartet

February 26th: Violin Sonata No 2

March 1st: Danish Songs

April 23rd: 'It was a lover and his lass'

(this series earlier featured the Cello Sonata and songs on December 11)

**The 23rd Annual Delius Festival, Florida** is now as follows:

**Thursday March 3rd** at Jacksonville University: Lecture given by Dr Fenby – Luncheon for composers featured in Composition Competition – Tour of Delius House – Competition Concert and awards to winners.

**Friday March 4th** at Friday Musicale: Delius Piano Concerto, Debussy Cello Sonata, Grieg Cello Sonata (1st movement).

**Saturday March 5th:** Lecture on 'Different conductors' interpretations of Delius' by John Canarina, former Director of Jacksonville University Orchestra – Film, '*A Song of Farewell*' – Evening concert: Elgar *Enigma Variations*; Holst *Planets* (3 mvts.); Delius *A Late Lark*, *Fantastic Dance* and *Songs of Farewell*. Conductors W McNeiland and Dr Fenby.

Further details of Delius Society events may be obtained from the Programme Secretary, Derek Cox: 01-677-8141 ext. 49



